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PREFACE

Inspectors general are in the communication business. Our ability to communicate effectively is essential to the success of the IG system. This text consists of three parts: Effective Writing, Interviewing, and Sensing Sessions. It is designed to help improve the effectiveness of inspectors general in these commonly used communication skills.

By no means is this material all you need to know; it assumes that you have achieved a certain level of expertise and experience in the use of basic communications. The text has been drawn from a multitude of sources and should be viewed as a compilation of tips and techniques to help sharpen your communicative skills.

Read carefully the information in this text before reporting to the IG Course. You will use this material frequently (to include homework assignments) throughout the course. Use it to improve your effectiveness as a communicator. Review this text periodically to help keep your communicative skills honed.

The ARMY TRAINER (Spring 90) was the source of the article on “Effective Writing.”

CHAPTER I

Effective Writing

"How many a dispute could have been deflated into a single paragraph if the disputants had dared to define their terms?"

Aristotle

"Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it, and above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light."

Joseph Pulitzer

"The definition of a good paper is an introduction and a conclusion placed not too far apart."

James A. Artis

"Writing is just plain hard work. If you don't believe me, just ask my speechwriter."

Chuck Huff

Effective Army Writing

By LTC Richard H. St. Denis

Don't underestimate the power of effective writing. It's part of daily Army life. Read now and write better later.

ARMY WRITING: TASK, CONDITIONS, STANDARDS

Writing in the Army is a military task like any other. You perform a writing task under certain conditions to achieve established standards.

Task: Your writing task is to create a document (memorandum, letter, operations order, SOP) to inform or persuade your intended audience. Your purpose in doing so is to remedy a practical problem -- the reader's lack of information for example.

Conditions: The conditions for writing are often tough. You're usually busy, under great pressure and on a deadline. So is your reader.

Standards: The Army has specific standards for your written work:

Effective Army writing transmits a clear message in a single, rapid reading and is generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics and usage. Good Army writing is concise, organized and right to the point. Put another way, your writing must --

Clearly tell your reader what he needs to know and what he needs to do.

Not waste his time.

Not distract him because of excessive errors.

The Army Writing Style. The work must be in the Army writing style, which has seven performance measures.

Short Words. A maximum of 15 percent long words of three or more syllables.

Short Sentences. An average sentence length of 15 words.

Short Paragraphs. Make paragraphs less than one inch deep (about six lines of type or 75 words long).

Short Papers. Make papers no more than two typed pages long.

Main Idea Up Front. Place the main idea -- the instructions, request, recommendation or summary of key points -- at the beginning.

Active Writing. Use the active voice as much as possible.

Correct, Complete and Credible Writing. Strive to be free of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, mechanics and usage.

Format Rules. The format (layout) of your paper must meet Army guidelines.

For memorandums and letters see AR 25-50. It prescribes letterheads, margins, spacing, paragraphing and similar points.

For tactical documents (OPORDS, estimates) see FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations for formats.

For administrative forms such as Officer Evaluation Reports, NCO Evaluation Reports, and the like, see the regulations that govern the forms.

Correspondence Rules. Your spelling, punctuation, grammar, mechanics, and usage must conform to the rules in AR 25-50 and the U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual.

Six Steps to a Perfect Paper

To ensure success in writing, you should follow a careful planning, rehearsal, evaluation and execution process.

Step 1. Understand Your Task, Condition and Standards.

In preparing to conduct training, the first step is to understand the task to be trained, the conditions under which you'll train and the standards you must meet. So it is when preparing a writing assignment.

First, pinpoint your purpose in writing.

Then assess the conditions under which you'll be writing -- time, place, suspense, and distractions are examples of the many influences on the conditions.

Picture your reader. Imagine his needs and the conditions under which he'll read your paper.

Know the standards for good Army writing.

Step 2. Gather and Organize Your Ideas Into a Working Plan.

The worst way to start training is to just start training. The best way to start is to plan it carefully. The same applies with writing. The best way to start is to think through your subject and organize your ideas.

"Mind-map" your thoughts; jot many quick notes on a blank page.

Conduct research to get more information, if needed.

Then write a detailed outline to put your ideas in a logical order.

Step 3. Write a Draft.

What happens after you plan your training? You rehearse it, of course. Writing requires similar action. After you outline your ideas, you write a draft -- a rehearsal for your final product.

As you write a draft, stick to your outline.

Express your ideas in plain English, and write mainly in the active voice.

Don't worry about mistakes. Just get through it completely. You'll fix the mistakes as you edit your work.

Step 4. Edit Your Draft to Army Standards.

Good trainers always evaluate their practice sessions and then revise as necessary. Likewise, you should evaluate and revise your writing to Army standards.

First, review the content for meaning, accuracy and completeness.

Then, check the structure or packaging of ideas.

Next, review the style for readability and tone.

Verify the spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Then, read it aloud (as if to your intended reader).

Set it aside for a while. Then revise it again.

Step 5. Fight for Feedback.

When reviewing your training, it's important to get another perspective. An external evaluation points out flaws in your plan and suggests improvements. The same goes for your writing. Your work improves when you receive a good critique from an impartial observer.

Have your office mates read your paper. Get their candid opinions.

Then review your work as needed.

Step 6. Go Final and Check It.

After you have planned, rehearsed, and evaluated your training plan, you're ready to conduct the training. Writing is the same. After your last minute checks, publish your final product.

Write a neat final copy.

Check it carefully!

Send it and follow up to ensure your paper got through to the intended reader.

Then hope for the best.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE WRITING

Follow these principles to improve your writing.

Write Only When You Have To.

Writing is often a chore. Worse, it can be inefficient, time consuming and stressful. So avoid it. Don't write unless you have to. Use the phone instead.

If You Must Write, Have a Clear Purpose.

Pinpoint exactly why you're writing. Is it to explain something? Is it to ask for something? Is it to give orders? Is it to answer a question?

Make sure you know why you're writing -- and your reader knows why you wrote!

Get Your Ideas Straight Before You Write.

Gather your thoughts and organize them before communicating.

Get Your Message Across Quickly -- In 30 Seconds or Less.

Tell your reader right away what he needs to know and why it's important. Like you, he's busy, under pressure, and easily distracted. Don't waste his time. Package your ideas for a quick reading.

Write to Express Your Ideas, Not to Impress Someone.

Write to draw attention to your message, not to yourself. Come across as a sensible person who knows that plain English is best.

Write the Way You Speak.

Isn't writing just a substitute for saying something in person? So imagine your reader is in front of you. Then talk to him. Be personal. Don't hide behind a bureaucratic mask. If you're writing for someone else's signature, adopt his tone.

Watch For Interference That Jams Your Message.

Be aware that other messages may distract the reader from yours. Consider the underlying messages in your writing, too.

Check Your Work Before You Send It Out.

Review it carefully. Consult with others. Coordinate your papers ahead of time with staffs and units affected.

Follow Up On Your Communications.

Check to see that your message gets through. Fight for feedback from your intended reader.

ADVICE TO SUPERVISORS OF WRITERS

You're important to the quality of writing in your organization. You play a big role in the development of good writers and the conditions under which they work. Those are serious responsibilities.

Train Your Writers to Use The Army Writing Style.

Tell them you want plain English. Teach them the rules of the Army Writing Style, as well as the formats for letters, memorandums, SOPs and other writing requirements. Don't force your personal style and “pet” expressions on them. Set an example with your own writing. Create a binder of good writing samples. Provide references for good writing such as AR 25-50, Preparing and Managing Correspondence, FM 101-5, Staff Organization and Operations and the Government Printing Office Style Manual.

Help Your Writers Get Started.

Clarify these points for every writing project you assign: purpose; topic; key points and desired tone; the intended audience; signer; length and format; and suspense date.

Require an Outline

For major projects, have writers submit an outline before they start a draft. The outline lets you see if they're on the right track before getting too far into the assignment. It also lets you check the content and structure without being too distracted by the style.

Review Papers Very Carefully

Ask yourself these questions: Does it meet the reader's needs? Is the tone proper? Is the main point clear? Is it credible, well-supported and well-organized? Is it concise? Is it free of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, mechanics and usage?

Don't nit-pick.

Suggest changes and let the writer make them. Give reasons for major changes.

ARMY TRAINER SPRING 90, LTC Richard H. St. Denis

The New Army Writing Style Guidelines

Use the following rules to meet the standard for Army writing:

Have the recommendation, conclusion, or reason for writing--the “bottom line”--in the first or second paragraph, not at the end.

Use short words (no more that 15% longer than two syllables).

Use short sentences (an average of 15 or fewer words).

Use the active voice. The passive voice lets the writer avoid responsibility. It is confusing and vague.

Use “I,” “you,” and “we” as subjects of sentences instead of “this office,” “this headquarters,” “all individuals,” etc.

Avoid jargon.

Avoid sentences that begin with “It is . . .” or “There is . . .” or “There are . . .”

Write paragraphs which, with few exceptions, are no more than one inch deep.

Use correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Write one page letters and memorandums for most correspondence.

CHAPTER II

Interviewing

"You can observe a lot just by watching."

Yogi Berra

"It is just as important to listen to someone with your eyes as it is with your ears."

Martin Buxbaum

"When the eyes say one thing and the tongue another, a practiced man relies on the language of the first."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"You must look into people as well as at them."

Lord Chesterfield

The Interviewing Process

Interviewing is a specialized pattern of communication used to obtain and furnish information. Remember, we are trying to gather or furnish information. Interviews are not interrogations.

In the IG business, interviews are normally either scheduled or walk-in. Scheduled interviews take place during inspections, inquiries, or investigations. In the Assistance and Investigation (A&I) Section of your IG office, walk-ins will be an everyday occurrence. Practice will make you more proficient at handling the unexpected disclosures certain to accompany many walk-ins. Where possible, we recommend that certain steps be completed prior to the interview, whether it be scheduled or a walk-in.

Set aside enough time. Make sure that there is ample time to gather the needed information and to complete the interview.

Set aside a private place where the interview can occur without being overheard or interrupted. In addition to preventing unwanted interruptions, a private setting might help the interviewee relax.

Review the information you need to gather or furnish. For scheduled interviews, be sure you have a list of questions, an interrogatory, so that you won't forget to ask any essential questions.

Plan for an uninterrupted interview. (No telephone calls, place “do not disturb” signs outside interview site.) Give the interviewee your undivided attention.

When conducting an interview, follow these steps:

Greet the individual to be interviewed. Greet the person the way that you would like to be greeted, and get out from behind your desk. This will help the person relax.

Define or state the purpose and scope of the interview. You should clearly state the purpose and scope of the interview before you begin the actual interview. This directs the person's attention immediately to the right subject. If you are receiving a complaint, you will want to direct the interviewee into describing the problem and how you can help.

Establish rapport. Rapport is a relationship built on harmony. Attempt to put the interviewee at ease. Nothing is more comforting to an interviewee than an interviewer with whom it is easy to talk.

Maintain control. The interviewer should control the interview. You can do this without talking a lot or giving orders. Remember, any time the interviewer lets the interviewee take a direction that does not relate to the purpose of the interview, the interviewer is losing control.

Don't argue. Even if you strongly disagree, remember that your job is to find out about someone's thoughts and feelings, not to convince him or her of anything. Don't make statements such as, “You're wrong,” or “That's not the way I see it.” These will put the interviewee on the defensive and decrease rapport.

Maintain strict impartiality**.** The perception that you are a fair and impartial interviewer is essential to your success, both in the interview and as an IG. Avoid giving the impression that you are siding with one party or another in the case. Do not allow the interviewee to interview you with question such as, “You wouldn’t like to be treated that way, would you?” Maintain your impartiality.

Do not try to solve the problem during the interview. The purpose of the interview is to gather information or take complaints. Unfortunately, there is a tendency for some interviewers to try to solve the problem immediately. Avoid giving advice on personal problems. Statements such as, “I think you should . . .” or “The way to handle this . . .” are precursors to personal advice. Remember, you are conducting an interview, not a counseling session.

Don't let the interviewee interview you. Often people will ask an interviewer for a personal reaction or opinion. Questions such as: “Would you put up with that?”, “Do you believe that?”, “Have you ever had trouble with your OIC?”, etc., are frequent. Don't answer these questions. Once an interviewer responds to such questions, he or she frequently loses his or her neutrality and also has to explain his or her own background or situation to the interviewee.

The easiest way to handle this situation is to ignore the questions and continue with the interview. If the person persists, you should simply state that you will have to find out what is going on, and that you will not answer until you are familiar with the situation.

However, if you elect to answer the question, a frank, brief, and truthful answer is best. Immediately following, you should redirect your attention and the interviewee's attention to the matter at hand.

Another pitfall of answering personal questions is that your answers could sidetrack the interviewee, and thus detract from the effectiveness of the interview.

Be a good listener. A good interviewer is a good listener. The quality of your listening can actually control another person's ability to talk. A common error made by an inexperienced interviewer is to be embarrassed by silence. Don't think you must fill periods of silence with questions or comments. A decent respect for silence is often helpful. A hasty interruption may leave an important part of the story forever untold.

Listening is not a passive process. It is a very active one. An earnest listener thinks ahead; weighs the points; reviews the ground covered; and searches for “between-the-lines meaning.” If you can answer immediately after a person asks a question, you probably were not listening. If you were getting an answer together, you may have not heard all the question. It is your responsibility to get all the information you need to accomplish your mission. Listen actively.

Most people need some feedback that they are being heard. A person who is asked a question and starts to answer may stop or become uneasy if the interviewer maintains an impassive stare. If an interviewer has to ask a lot of questions in order to keep the person providing information, the interview can become an interrogation.

Positive listening responses are neutral, nonjudgmental expressions or gestures that show interest and understanding to the speaker. Brief comments such as, “I see,” “Oh,” I understand,” “Yes,” can be used to encourage a speaker without intruding on his or her story or indicating belief or disbelief. A small gesture such as a nod, a smile, or eye contact are often sufficient to maintain some rapport with the interviewee. Try neutral phrases such as, “Tell me more about it,” “Go on,” or “Explain what happened next.”

Accept the interviewee's feelings. We are not all at the same place at the same time; so learn to accept a person's feelings. You are not out to pass judgment on anyone. You are only trying to get the facts. Don't give false reassurances.

Make perception checks. Perception checks are descriptions (often as questions) of what is perceived to be another person's feelings. A perception check is a test of whether or not the interviewer has decoded accurately the person's expressions of feelings.

For example, an interviewer may say to an interviewee, “I get the impression that you are upset with what your first sergeant is doing.” The interviewee may never have said anything exactly like this, but the interviewer has inferred the feelings from the interviewee's manner and comments. The interviewer must check out his or her conclusions to be sure they reflect what the interviewee is feeling. The most direct way to check the accuracy of a perception is to ask.

Just as it is important to be sure that you understand what a person means, it is also important to understand what he or she feels.

People express themselves through verbal and nonverbal methods. All the information an interviewer receives from a person (his or her words, gestures, facial expressions, postures, tone of voice, etc.), leads to a perception about how the person feels. Check your perceptions with the interviewee.

In making perception checks, don't ask why someone feels a certain way. For example, if you asked, “Why are you so angry with your first sergeant?” you would not be checking on feelings as much as forcing the interviewee to respond to your perception of their feelings. You might have been mistaken in thinking the interviewee is angry. Use phrases such as: “You seem to feel . . .,” or “I get the impression . . . ,” or “Is it true . . . ,” or “It sounds to me as if you feel . . . .”

Avoid expressing either approval or disapproval. Never say, “It seems to me that you shouldn't get so upset with your first sergeant,” or “I think you have the right to feel disappointed that nobody commented on your suggestions.” These are not perception checks. These are your value judgments, which may have the effect of further angering the individual.

Now, let us consider the central point of the interview: Questioning . . .

Question appropriately.

Ask one question at a time and present the questions in a logical sequence. Allow enough time for the individual to answer in his or her own words. If the answer is satisfactory, proceed promptly to the next question. The wording of questions may affect the answers given. Use simple, concrete terms. Don't ask bullying or tricky questions. Your method of asking questions should be friendly, yet business-like. Remember that the wording of a question is often less important than the manner and tone of voice in which it is put. If you are interested in understanding, your manner and tone will reflect that feeling. Probe only as far as is necessary to obtain needed information. As mentioned earlier, questioning is the central method of interviewing. Now let's look at the three main methods of interviewing.

The directive method of interviewing uses probing questions seeking specific information, e.g., “How long have you been working in your job?”, “Do you work on the operations or education side of the house?” These questions would get specific answers.

However, the nondirective approach may ask: “How do you like working in your job and why?”, or “Why did you pick the education side of the house?” These questions deal with feelings and thoughts.

Then, finally, the mixed/combined method brings out specific information, thoughts, and feelings.

Normally you should avoid asking questions that lead to simple “yes” or “no” answers. Such answers provide little information and put pressure on the interviewer to have the next question ready. In addition, most situations do not lend themselves to absolute (yes or no) answers. (“Have you stopped beating you spouse yet? Yes or no!”) “Yes-no” questions might be useful in interrogations, but are not very helpful in interviewing.

Use silence to force a response. Silence can be a powerful technique to elicit responses from reluctant interviewees. One way to use silence is to say nothing and look expectantly at the person. This usually conveys the message, “Tell me more, I'm waiting.” Use this technique carefully. It does not relax people. The additional pressure of silence could exacerbate a tense interview into a hostile one.

Closing the interviewing session: Once you have all the information needed, how should you end the interview?

Evaluate the information gathered. If appropriate, make a statement to the effect that you believe you have all the necessary data or ask the interviewee if he or she has anything else to offer. As an IG, you should always ask “What do you want the IG to do for you?”

Help in the formulation of solutions. If you are taking a complaint, simply tell the person what his or her options are in working toward a solution. Let the interviewee decide what to do.

Set up a time for continuation if necessary. When you have been going for an hour, it's probably time to stop unless the urgency of the situation dictates otherwise. Both of you can become tired and it's best to leave the interview in a positive mood.

Extend your appreciation. Always extend your appreciation to the interviewee for participating in the interview.

Active Listening

An excellent way to improve communications skills is to work at active listening. This means more than simply concentrating on what the other person is saying. It includes letting the other person know you have heard him or her. We frequently assume we know what the other person means by his or her words, that we understand what he or she intended. This may be the case, but often we may be missing an important element in the communication. It is useful to check to see if we have heard what the speaker really intended to communicate.

The basic skill involved in active listening is paraphrasing or putting into your own words what the other person seems to be communicating to you. This gives the speaker a way to know whether or not the meaning is getting through to you or whether you have missed the point and need additional clarification. Paraphrasing is letting the other person know what you understood in order to test whether or not you have received the communication correctly.

Steps in Active Listening:

Step 1: Bill: (Sender sends message) “I don't want to go to the play tonight!”

Step 2: Mary: (Listener paraphrases) “You are not interested in seeing this play?”

Step 3: Bill: (Sender revises) “No, I'd like to see the play sometime, but I'm worried about the work I need to get done for tomorrow.”

Step 4: Mary: (Listener responds to message) “I can understand that you really wouldn't enjoy the play with everything you have on your mind. Why don't I try to get tickets for Saturday night instead?”

Important elements of the active listening process include:

Paraphrasing: Putting the other person's ideas into your own words so he can tell whether or not you understand him.

An attitude of “I <u>want</u> to hear you,” and “I accept that you have something important to say.”

In your paraphrasing, imply the question: “Is this what you're saying?”

Ask yourself: “What message am getting from this person?” Reflect on the <u>total</u> message being received, both <u>verbal and non-verbal.</u> Paraphrasing is any means of showing the other person what you understood. Paraphrasing may respond to the content of the communication, what the person feels about the content, or both. <u>Sometimes the feeling level will be the real message</u>, and at the other times almost no feeling at all will be involved. Effective paraphrasing will help identify the real message.

Jim: “I have just about had it with that son of mine!”

Gene: “You sound pretty angry with him.”

Learning To Paraphrase:

People sometimes think of paraphrasing as merely putting the other person's ideas in another way; they try to say the same thing with different words. Such “word swapping” may merely result in the illusion of mutual understanding, when actually there is none. It can become a kind of parroting that is meaningless.

Effective paraphrasing is not a trick or a verbal gimmick. It comes from an attitude, a desire to know what the other person means. To satisfy this desire, you reveal the meaning the comment had for you so that the speaker can check whether it matches the intended meaning.

To paraphrase is not to make a judgment about the other person. The speaker is the only one who knows what was really meant. Paraphrasing might not be in the form of a question, but a question is always implied. Paraphrasing does not mean approving or even agreeing with what a person says. It is simply a way to let the speaker know you heard and understood.

Obviously, paraphrasing is not your only response in a lively conversation, but it is often a neglected element. This kind of active listening can greatly facilitate good communication. There are other benefits from paraphrasing. It lets others know that you are really interested in what they are saying. It shows that you want to know what they mean. If others feel you can understand their point of view, they are more likely to want to hear your point of view. Also, paraphrasing can be useful to others by helping them clarify their own thoughts or feelings.

How To Be A Better Listener

Pay attention. The instant you notice your mind wandering, stop and get back at once to what the speaker is saying. If you must, ask him to go back a bit and repeat or explain what was said.

Keep your mind open. Don't assume you already know what the speaker is going to say, and don't follow the speaker's thoughts to your own conclusions. Let the speaker finish completely before making any judgments.

Use the extra thinking time you have to organize the speaker's ideas and paraphrase them in your own words.

To encourage the speaker to talk, give attentive eye contact, an occasional nod, or comments such as, "Yes, I see what you mean," "Mmmmhmmm," "Go on . . ." (but don't overdo this--it can be distracting.)

Try to put yourself in the speaker's shoes. Try to imagine his or her feelings. Also try to understand his or her point of view.

When you don't understand what someone has said, ask for an explanation. If you are at all unsure, paraphrase what you heard to be sure you understand, for example, "Do you mean the shipment will be delayed because of the rail strike?"

In a stressful situation, try to relax. Take a few deep breaths, clear your mind, and tell yourself you're simply there to listen. If you don't understand something, ask to have it repeated or explained. If you're put on the spot with a tough question, take your time. Pause before you answer. Give yourself a chance to think and compose your response.

If you find listening difficult, remind yourself of the benefits of listening to this person.

Interview Standards Outline

Greet the individual to be interviewed.

Explain the purpose and scope of the interview.

Establish rapport.

Maintain control.

Don't argue.

Maintain impartiality.

Do not try to "solve the problem" during the interview.

Don't let the interviewee interview you.

Be a good listener.

Accept the interviewee's feelings.

Make perception checks.

Question appropriately.

Use silence to force a response.

Evaluate the information gathered.

In closing the interviewing session:

Help in the formulation of solutions.

Set up a time for continuation, if necessary.

Extend your appreciation.

Feedback For Interviewing Skills

Interviewer________________Observer________________Date_____

INSTRUCTIONS:

Observer: Please provide written feedback to the interviewer. Use specific examples.

Interviewer: Use this form to make notes on your own behavior for later study.

1. Describe how the interviewer established rapport with the interviewee. How effective was this?

2. Did the interviewer make and maintain eye contact?

3. Was the interviewer's posture appropriately relaxed?

4. Did the interviewer fidget or play with pencils, paper, etc.?

5. What was the interviewer's voice quality?

6. Did the interviewer appear interested in the interview?

7. Did the interviewer have any distracting habits?

8. Did the interviewer interpret information accurately? Give examples.

9. Did the interviewer seem prepared? Give examples of how preparedness worked for the interviewer.

10. Did the interviewer use appropriate language, (e.g., slang, acronyms, incorrect English, etc.)?

11. Did the interviewer seem in charge of the interview?
Give examples.

12. Use one or two adjectives to describe the interviewer's

a. Timing

b. Questioning Skills

c. Flexibility

d. Interest

13. Did the interviewer respond appropriately to the interviewee's feelings, experiences, and hidden agendas?

14. Was the interviewer respectful of the interviewee? Give examples.

15. Was the interviewer's verbal and nonverbal behavior consistent? Give examples.

16. Did the interviewer get the interviewee to outline the problem?

17. Did the interviewer correctly identify themes, i.e., was he or she accurate in making connections between parts of the problem that fit together?

18. Did the interviewer correctly determine the interviewee's expectations about the interview?

19 Was the interviewer too blunt? If so, give examples.

20. Other comments.

Interviewing Techniques

The interview process is a face-to-face meeting between two or more people in which one party (interviewee) responds to questions posed by the other party (interviewer). The primary objective of an interview is to collect or gather information.

There are two types of interviews: Individual and Group.

Some advantages of individual interviews are that the person interviewed is involved directly, and feels more committed. Also, you have the flexibility to search out or pursue specific issues. Disadvantages include the sample size (one) and the breadth of information is limited to the individual's knowledge.

Some advantages of group interviews are that group interviews can be more time effective. They enable you to glean more varied opinions and perceptions. They usually yield more ideas and opinions than individual interviews. Disadvantages are that it can be difficult to establish trust with everyone in a group interview; some members of the group might feel threatened by the presence of others; or the group could "gang up" on the interviewer.

The interviewing process consists of several phases:

- Preparation - planning for the interview.
- Introduction - information giving.
- Body - information gathering.
- Closure - concluding the interview.
- Poststeps - evaluation.

In preparing, or planning, for the interview. determine your objectives. What do you want to accomplish during the interview? Whom do you need to interview? Should it be an individual or group interview? What questions must be asked? How much time is available? What is the physical setting of interview site?

The introduction phase of the interview is used for information giving. Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the interview. Explain why the person was chosen for the interview. Tell the person how the information gathered in the interview will be used. Explain the ground rules of the interview. The introduction is the time to establish rapport with the person being interviewed. You build rapport by establishing and maintaining eye contact, assuming a comfortable posture, and projecting the proper voice quality.

The body of the interview is information gathering. Your objective is to gather and capture for the record the information produced by the interview. How the information is recorded will vary depending upon the circumstances of the interview. Sometimes you will take notes throughout the interview; sometimes you will record the interview using a tape recorder.

Regardless of how you capture the information, there are techniques you can use to elicit the information you are seeking. Both questioning and listening are key.

There are several ways to ask a question. A direct question usually results in a specific answer about a particular topic. They are useful when you are trying to get detailed information about specific issues. They might not provide any additional information that might be helpful in your case. If they are not carefully phrased they can appear threatening and arouse defensiveness. An example of a direct question might be "Were you on the rifle range at 0915 last Friday?" Answers to this question are limited to "yes" or "no." Reactions to this question could be "Why is he asking me this? Where is he going with this question?"

Open ended questions allow the interviewee to provide the information he or she thinks is important. They encourage the interviewee to tell his or her story from a personal perspective. An open ended question might be "Can you tell me what happened at the rifle range last Friday?" The answer might give you more information than the direct question would.

Open ended questions allow for wider range of answers. They permit the interviewee to answer in manner he or she sees fit and provide interviewers with more information. They are also seen as less threatening than direct questions.

Examples of open-ended questions you might want to use in sensing sessions include:

- What should the unit stop doing?
- What should the unit start doing?
- What should the unit continue doing?

Probes are designed to get out underlying reasons for previous comments. They are useful when trying to get interviewee to focus on aspects of subject about which you want further information or when you require a more specific answer.

There are words, described as "trigger words," that might trigger probing questions during an interview. Some examples of trigger words and the probes that can force the interviewee to be more specific include:

- TRIGGER WORDS: Things, this, that, it, them, they.
- WORDS TO FORCE SPECIFICITY: What things? Which “them” do you mean?
- TRIGGER WORDS: All, every, never, no one, women, blacks, whites.
- WORDS TO FORCE SPECIFICITY: All? Every? It <u>never</u> happened?
- TRIGGER WORDS: Improve, increase, stop, change, decrease.
- WORDS TO FORCE SPECIFICITY: How specifically would you . . . ?

No matter what kind of questions you ask, there are times when you will want to soften the question without giving up any of the specificity you want in an answer. Phrases such as the following might be helpful:

- I'm curious . . . ?
- I was wondering . . . ?
- Would you happen to know . . .?

Leading questions are questions that are phrased in such a way that the interviewee thinks there is an expected or “appropriate” response. Leading questions suggest or exclude possible answers. They can create a climate in which interviewee becomes defensive and feels manipulated. Although they can be useful in getting respondents focused when they are vague, they can have unintended results. Use them with care.

After you ask your questions, remember why you are conducting the interview and *listen* to the response. Use the techniques described earlier in the active listening section and pay attention to the information the interviewee is giving you.

When you have achieved your objective in the interview it is time to close. Conclude the interview by summarizing the interview and thanking the interviewee for participating.

After the interview you will review what you learned and determine if you met all of your objectives, if new data or information surfaced in this interview and what steps you will want to take based on this interview. Did you identify any new issues or trends? What was the attitude of the interviewee. How did the interview process go? Were your questions effective? Did you sequence them properly? Was the physical setting satisfactory? What can you do differently the next time to have a better interview?

CHAPTER III

Sensing Sessions

"Some problems never get solved; they just get older."

Lloyd L. Newbanks

"It is not best that we should all think alike; it is difference of opinion which makes horse races."

Mark Twain

"When all think alike, none thinks very much."

Ronald Gould

Planning and Conducting Sensing Sessions

A sensing session is a group interview designed to provide the interviewer with feedback on issues affecting the group. Full service IG offices have a continuing need to conduct sensing sessions. During the development of the sensing session plan remember that the objective of a sensing session is to provide commanders and decision makers perceptions of soldiers, civilians, and family members as representatives of their particular group. Commanders use this information to gain insight into the unit, environmental conditions, or special issues about which they are concerned.

You should determine and clearly define the purpose of this particular sensing session, e.g., conduct command climate assessment, conduct community support assessments, etc.

Since you will normally work with a partner (one facilitator and one recorder) you should identify the team members early and work together in the planning process. (Both team members should, of course, be IGs whenever possible because they will be handling IG records and information.) In that way, the recorder will be more attuned to significant points brought up during the fast moving exchanges that occur during sensing sessions. The recorder must be allowed to periodically enter into the conversation in order to clarify or verify what was said and to ask questions the leader missed.

You need to identify the issues and areas to be addressed and prepare a lead-in question for each issue.

After you have identified the issues to be addressed, you can consolidate them on a questionnaire. Sample questionnaires are at page 25. Distribute your questionnaires to the session participants as they arrive. Questionnaires give the group members something to do and think about while waiting for all participants to arrive and help orient the group to the areas you will later discuss.

You can conduct sensing sessions without questionnaires if your preparation has been thorough and the time available precludes production of a questionnaire.

When collected at the end of the session, questionnaires provide written documentation that will contribute to the write-up of the sensing session.

You must consider the time available for a sensing session from two aspects.

First, the number of sensing sessions scheduled for a given day should be carefully planned. Allow enough time between sessions to prepare for the next one. The preferred number of sessions per day is three: one in the morning; one in the afternoon; and one in the evening (if family members are desired). If more than one session is conducted in the morning and afternoon, you will not have time between sessions to consolidate your notes, and the quality of the feedback to the commander could suffer.

Second, a sensing session should not normally exceed 2 hours. The preferred planning time for a sensing session is 90 minutes. You should begin to wind-down the sensing session approximately 15 minutes before you want to end it. During the initial part of the wind-down, you will get a feel for the personality of the particular group as to whether or not you are going to have difficulty closing out the session. The amount of time allowed for the session to continue should be based on whether or not you have sufficiently addressed each issue or area of interest. You must decide if spending additional time is worth it to you and the participants. Under no circumstances should you allow a session to run overtime if another group is waiting to start the next session. Try to allow a minimum of one hour between scheduled sessions.

The location of the sensing sessions should be relatively private, preferably away from the headquarters. A conference room or classroom normally meets this need.

The size of the group may range from 8-15. If more than 15 participants are allowed in a group, you will not be able to maintain sufficient eye contact with the entire group. Eye contact is important. It enables you to gauge the reaction of the group to statements and to solicit other views in response.

You should stratify your groups. This is an essential factor in developing open and honest discussions. Some possible groupings by strata are:

Group 1: PVT-SPC + GS2-GS4

Group 2: SGT-SSG + GS5-GS9

Group 3: SFC-MSG + GS10-GS12

Group 4: LTs and FAMILY MEMBERS (OFFICER)

Group 5: MAJ-LTC + GS13-GS14

How you organize your groups depends upon the particular circumstances of your situation.

Notification to unit. Whenever possible the unit should be notified in writing as far in advance as possible. Support requirements such as room requirements, number of participants, the date and time for each group, should be identified in the notification letter. You should emphasize two areas here:

First, ensure the unit designates a point of contact (POC) for the above support requirement coordination.

Second, participation <u>should</u> be voluntary (it is essential that family participation be voluntary). If the POC indicates difficulty in obtaining the family member participation, you should suggest that he contact different units and request additional representation. Normally, this is not a problem as most units have plenty of family members who welcome the opportunity to voice their opinions.

You should also remember the requirements of FM 25-100 when planning these sessions.

Notify units outside their near-term planning window. This minimizes impact on training readiness and is in accordance with Army doctrine.

For obvious reasons, observers from the chain of command must be excluded from attendance at sensing sessions. This includes ensuring that supervisory relationships are avoided within a single group. You should always ask if any member of the group supervises any other member of the group. Additionally, the number of sessions must be large enough to provide anonymity for the participants. If you only interview one group, and then report to the commander, he or she might as well be in the room during the session.

For the conduct of sensing sessions, consider the following:

Room Arrangement: Arrange the room so that the participants can see each other and you. Avoid using a “classroom” configuration since it is difficult for everyone to maintain eye contact when they are sitting in rows

Questionnaire: You may want to hand out questionnaires to participants as they arrive and ask them to begin filling them out.

Introductions: After all participants have arrived and are working on the questionnaires, you should introduce yourself and your partner. It is not appropriate to have the participants introduce themselves, or identify what organization they represent. You should develop a feel for the group through generalized questions, such as, “How many infantrymen are here today?” etc.

Process: Explain that the purpose of this particular sensing session is to obtain group consensus (where possible) on perceptions of the issues and areas addressed on the questionnaires. This information will become feedback to the commander for consideration and action. Inform the group that this is not a “complaint” session, but individual complaints may be addressed to you following the sensing session. A person’s experience in the area being discussed is acceptable and solicited for discussion.

Nonattribution: Remind the group of nonattribution and emphasize that not only will you protect their anonymity but you expect and require that each individual in the room respect the privacy rights of the others. What is said and by whom should not be discussed by the group participants once they depart the sensing session. You must explain that your partner will be taking notes about what is said concerning the issues, but not the names of the participants.

Credibility and Trust: You should make special effort towards establishing your credibility with the group as well as developing trust in you and your partner. One way to do this is to tell a participant who has made a comment "You have made a good point here. I want to make sure we capture this issue. I also want to preclude any possibility that you could be tied to having given us this information. Therefore, I am going to summarize this issue for my partner (the note taker) without identifying the particular group." This might help the group to relax and thus be more open to you.

Attitude: Do not patronize or talk down to the group or any of the participants. This will turn a group off more quickly than anything else, and all you will get is what they think you want to hear. Most groups will correct or contradict an obnoxious individual if you give them the opportunity.

Rapport: You must develop rapport with the group early in the session. However, you must be careful to keep your comments and demeanor professional.

Involvement: You must make every effort to get everyone involved in the discussion. One way is to maintain eye contact. You will know when an individual has something to say. You can tell the quiet members "You looked as if you were going to say something a minute ago" and encourage them to speak.

Listening: Be a good listener. Let the group ramble from time to time. Your main constraint here is the session time limitation and your need to ensure that the main areas and issues identified for discussion are adequately addressed.

Teach and Clarify: Be prepared to teach. You will often need to explain or clarify Army policies on issues under discussion due to inaccurate perceptions by group members. You must be careful here to avoid the very real possibility of the sensing session turning into a lecture. Explain the Army policy briefly and succinctly and get back to the business of sensing.

Cautions: Do not make promises or commitments during a sensing session. It is quite easy to fall into the trap of telling someone you can fix a problem that is obviously broken and will only require a couple of telephone calls. More often than not, the "other side of the coin" will show a different slant on the problem. The IG system loses credibility because you have already committed to "fix" the problem. The correct response for any allegation, whether during a sensing session or an individual complaint session, is, "We will look into this matter." Remember, there are usually at least three sides to every story. If you "launch" on the first story you hear, you will be wrong at least two-thirds of the time!

You will know when you have conducted a good sensing session. As the participants depart, they will make comments along the lines of "Thanks for listening," "Thanks for coming," or "I feel better just being able to talk about it," etc.

Closing the sensing session:

Begin to close the session approximately 15 minutes before your scheduled completion time. You have several actions that should be accomplished, and each action can frequently take more time than expected.

If the session was successful, say so.

Have the second IG (note taker) summarize the areas and issues covered and the general responses in each area. Confirm, where applicable, a general consensus from the group on the areas and issues discussed.

Explain what you will do with the information, i.e., brief the appropriate commander. You must now again reemphasize the need for confidentiality and nonattribution.

Thank the participants, collect the questionnaires, and close the session. Remain available for individual questions.

The two IGs must, as soon as possible, discuss and consolidate the appropriate information obtained during the session with the input from the questionnaires and prepare to brief the results.

Presenting the results: There is no mandatory format used to present the results of sensing sessions. The IGs should use whatever method fits the situation and the material to be presented. There are however, several key factors that are critical to the sensing session process:

Remind the commander that you summarized the data in such a way as to protect the confidentiality of the individual participants. Credibility of the IG system, and your future success as an IG within the command, may well rest on how you handle the data you collect. You should (almost) never attribute a particular comment to an individual, either pro or con. If the participants ever think information was “leaked” your ability to conduct sensing sessions or other IG business will be compromised.

Some commanders may tend to overreact to information gleaned from sensing sessions, especially if the information indicates problems within the organization. It is important that the commander be reminded that the information represents perception as opposed to fact, and that additional homework and careful analysis may be required to turn the raw data into useful intelligence.

Seldom is sensing session data used alone. It should be used as a source of leads for further information gathering, or as a cross-check of information gained from other sources.

Sensing Session Questionnaires

QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT #1

QUALITY OF LIFE AT FT VON STEUBEN.

Instructions: Please review these questions and be ready to respond to them in the sensing session (group interview). You are encouraged (but not required) to write on this sheet and to turn it in after the session. Give examples to clarify your response. Identify all subject areas you feel are being managed satisfactorily, as well as those which need improvement.

DO NOT SIGN THIS SHEET.

1. Where do you live? (Housing area on post, off post, etc.)

2. How would you rate the housing support (assignment of quarters, maintenance, etc.) in your community (if you live on post)?

3. How well does the school system support your needs?

4. How well do the PX and commissary support your needs?

5. How well do the medical support facilities and personnel support your needs?

6. How would you rate the recreation facilities on post?

7. How would you rate the child care facility on post?

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8. Are there any other quality of life issues (either good or bad) that you would like to bring to the attention of the post commander?

QUESTIONNAIRE FORMAT #2

QUALITY OF LIFE AT FT VON STEUBEN.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please review these questions and be ready to respond to them in the sensing session (group interview). You are encouraged (but not required) to circle the appropriate response (write on this sheet) and to turn it in after the session. Give examples to clarify your response.

DO NOT SIGN THIS SHEET.

1. Where do you live?
   a. Troop barracks.
   b. Huff Housing Area.
   c. Artis Acres.
   d. Marty Manor.
   e. Off-post housing.

2. How would you rate the housing support (assignment of quarters, maintenance, etc.) in your community (if you live on post)?
   a. Excellent.
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

3. How would you rate the school system?
   a. Excellent.
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

4. How would you rate the PX and commissary?
   a. Excellent
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

5. How would you rate the medical support facilities and personnel?
   a. Excellent.
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

6. How would you rate the recreation facilities on post?
   a. Excellent.
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

Communicative Skills____

7. How would you rate the child care facility on post?
   a. Excellent.
   b. Good.
   c. Marginally Below Standard.
   d. Poor.
   e. No comment.

8. What other quality of life issues (either good or bad) would you like to bring to the attention of the post commander?
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

Typical Introduction to a Sensing Session.

1. Hello, my name is ___________ of the ___IG office. This is my partner, ________________.

2. We have asked you here as part of a special inspection that the ___IG is doing on (subject of the sensing session).

3. We are going to conduct what is known as a "sensing session." Have any of you attended one before? I will explain what it is:

a. During our inspection -- and this may be different from what you think of as an inspection -- we gather information and feed it back to the installation commander.

b. One of the things we are interested in, in this inspection, is how people are responding to (subject of the sensing session). We cannot talk to everyone, so we get a sampling of what people think and feel -- that's where you come in. You are a representative group in whose opinions we are interested.

c. When we do sensing sessions, we ask for groups of 12 to 20 or so people. Since we are going to speak with 10 groups in this inspection, we will eventually talk with between 120 and 200 people.

d. As you can see, what your group talks about will be combined with what other groups say, and what will come out of that is a pattern or trend. That is what we will report back to the commander.

e. Now, we want you to feel perfectly at ease so you will talk freely with us. To help you feel comfortable, we propose these ground rules:

(1) Anyone may speak and everyone has an equally important say, regardless of rank or position.

(2) You may talk about facts, opinions, feelings, or anything that bears on the issue. We are interested specifically in your thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

(3) My partner will take notes to capture the essence of what you are saying. He will not take names, or in any way attribute what you are saying to who you are. We are very sensitive to the fact that you might not talk as freely about things if you think your comments could later be attributed to you.

(4) Our report of this session will not include your names or identify in any way the makeup of the group beyond a generic statement such as, "We talked to eight groups on Fort Von Steuben. One group was made up of senior NCOs, who indicated that . . .".

(5) We will brief the results to whatever level might be able to fix the problems identified here.

(6) The only time we might attribute a name to a statement is if one of you indicates you have evidence of a crime, a violation of security, or a serious breach of integrity. If that

happens, we will attempt to look into that issue separately from this sensing session. If this occurs, I will ask you to discuss that evidence with me after the sensing session is adjourned.

(7) If you want to discuss something, not related to this sensing session, that you want us as IGs to help you with, we will remain afterwards to handle that issue one-on-one. This sensing session is not designed to be an individual complaint session. However, we are available after the session to help if you need it.

(8) We will take a break in about an hour and then get back together for another hour if necessary. We have allotted up to 2 hours for this session. It can go a little longer or shorter, depending on how much you want to say, but we will not go much more than 2 hours.

--- Does anyone have a question about the ground rules?

4. Questionnaire.

a. Okay, then, let's look at the questionnaire you received as you arrived.

b. The questionnaire shows you where we are going in the session. We can stray from it if you have pertinent information that is not on the sheet.

c. You do not have to write on the questionnaire. You may leave written comments with us, anonymously if you wish. If you leave comments, we will read and consider them.

d. Take a minute now to review this sheet.

5. All right, let's begin.

Sensing Session Checklist

You may use this checklist to critique sensing sessions -- your own or others':

1. PREPARATION.

Was enough time allowed for the session?

Was enough time allowed between sessions?

Was the location appropriate?

Was the group size appropriate?

Was the group organized to fit the purpose?

Was the unit notified in sufficient time to avoid problems?

If civilian employees were involved, was the local bargaining unit (union) contacted?

Were observers kept out of the room?

Was the room arranged appropriately?

2. EXECUTION. Did the leader and recorder:

Arrive in time to set things up?

Use an outline or questionnaire?

"Warm up" the group adequately?

Orient the group concerning:

Purpose of the session?

Personal complaints?

Nonattribution?

Note-taking?

Gain the trust and confidence of the group so that the group talked freely?

Capture the necessary information?

Avoid making promises?

Avoid getting defensive?

3. CLOSING THE SESSION. Did the leader and recorder:

Begin the closing in time?

Summarize the discussion?

Explain how the information will be used?

Reemphasize the need for <u>everyone</u> to protect confidentiality?

Thank the participants?

Remain behind to take personal complaints (IGARS)?